



King County

Metropolitan King County Council Growth Management and Natural Resources Committee

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SUBJECT

Briefing on Executive's 2008 recommended amendments to King County Comprehensive Plan ("KCCP"), Chapter 3 – Rural Area and Natural Resource Lands. The intent of the chapter is to outline an approach to conserving rural and natural resource lands that recognizes the need to respect and maintain:

- A diversity of lifestyle choices,
- Viable farming and forestry economies,
- Environmental quality and wildlife habitat, and
- Links to King County's resource-based heritage.

This Chapter has been highly modified both in structure and substance. In terms of structure, subsections have been reformatted and policies moved. Language has been tightened up. In terms of substance, there is a shift towards focusing the use of the Transfer of Development Rights program in distinct, pilot projects and a shift away from identifying and mapping distinct equestrian communities.

SYNOPSIS OF KEY ISSUES

The changes proposed for this chapter touch upon a wide range of issues. For the purpose of today's general overview, the staff report will focus upon the following major themes:

1. Broadening perspectives on Rural Area activities
2. Sustaining Agriculture and Forestry
3. Rural and Resource Lands Preservation Program
4. Equestrian Issues
5. Rural Area Health

6. Climate change effects

1. Broadening perspectives on Rural Area activities

The text and policy revisions strengthen the concept that “Rural Area” designation means more than rural residential living. It is intended to exemplify the multi-use nature of rural lands, meaning that working farms and forests, livestock uses, home-based businesses that are an integral part of “Rural Character,” as opposed to a more narrow view as an area focused upon provision of low density, residential development. This broadened perspective is perhaps best illustrated in the change of the rural land use designation from “Rural Residential” to “Rural Area.” This change has not only been made in this Chapter, but also in the Comprehensive Plan update as a whole, and in proposed Code revisions.

2. Sustaining and Enhancing Agriculture and Forestry

The sustainability and enhancement of the underlying economic health of the Rural Area and natural resource lands is deemed by the Executive as critical to the allowing the range of lifestyle choices available in these areas.

In order maintain that underlying economic health, the Executive-proposed policy and text revisions represent the continuing implementation of the recommendations of the December 2005 Rural Economic Strategies Report. These recommendations are manifested in policy and text revisions (e.g. policies E-104, E-105, E-108 and E-111a on pages 3-7 through 3-9) that focus on:

- Promoting “value-added” processing activities for both the agricultural and the forest industry within the rural area and resource lands,
- Working with cities to promote farmers markets and business that support agriculture,
- Promoting and supporting production, harvesting, processing and marketing of agricultural and forest products,
- Ensuring that regulation applying to agricultural and forest practices do not discourage such activities on lands in long-term agriculture or forestry, and
- Expanding incentives to keep rural area and resource lands in long-term agriculture or forestry.

Although the modifications in this section contain many policy and text revisions, they should not pose a concern in regards to being inconsistent with the general direction taken by the Executive and Council in recent years to promote the economic viability of the Rural Area and Natural Resource Lands.

3. The Rural and Resource Lands Preservation Program

The County is called upon to plan for and allow appropriate future growth and development. Development pressures continue to increase on rural and resource lands adjacent to Rural Cities. For this reason, the Executive seeks to adopt a Rural and Resource Land Preservation program (see policies R-221 through R-223 on pages 3-17 and 3-18) to reduce and redirect rural development potential into the Urban Areas through a revised Transfer of Development Rights program.

The basic goals of the Rural and Resource Land Preservation program are outlined in new policy R-221.

R-221 The goals of the Rural and Resource Land Preservation Program are to: (1) reduce the development potential in rural and resource lands by 25%; (2) increase activity in the TDR market; (3) bolster demand for TDRs; (4) offer rural property owners access to incentive programs; (5) protect low-density rural areas from encroaching urban development; and (6) reduce carbon emissions by decreasing vehicle miles traveled from the rural area and by sequestering carbon in the Rural Area.

The Executive recommends testing this program through a handful of pilot projects over the next four years. The initial pilot project is located north of the SR 18/I-90 interchange and relates to the proposed move and expansion of the Snoqualmie Valley Hospital.

The potential for other pilot projects is currently being evaluated by executive staff and may result in additional pilot projects being transmitted for Committee consideration later this year.

One such potential project involves the John Henry mine site that is adjacent to the City of Black Diamond. Although the City's 2007 docket request for redesignation to "Urban" was denied by the Executive, the presence of significant environmental hazards to the City and the surrounding community is causing the Executive to revisit the opportunity to accelerate reclamation of the mine.

NOTE: The intent of today's briefing is to alert Committee to key elements of the Rural Chapter. The Committee will receive a more detailed briefing about the Rural and Resource Land Preservation program when detailed proposed Code revisions for the Transfer of Development Rights program are provided to the Council later this Spring.

4. Equestrian Uses

The new proposals seek to address the needs of equestrian uses in a manner that does not rely upon the map designation of specific areas as "Equestrian Communities." This shift (see policies R-112 through R-115 and text amendments on pages 3-9 through 3-11) is based in large measure on following two factors:

- First, the Equestrian Communities map was subject to revision only on a four-year cycle, thus requiring areas that wanted such designation to wait for lengthy period; and
- Second, equestrian activities are found throughout the entire Rural Area, as well as in the Natural Resource Lands; and are a key element in defining the character of these areas.

According to executive staff, this shift away from reliance upon the Equestrian Communities map has been supported by proponents of expansion of equestrian activities.

- R-112 King County should support the identified equestrian ~~((communities))~~ uses in the Rural Area by providing facilities on King County rights-of-way where not in conflict with the terms of utility easements to accommodate horse travel~~((;))~~; by maintaining equestrian links, including multiple-use trails, where appropriate~~((;))~~; and by adoption of supportive land use regulations for use of these areas for horsekeeping. King County will work with local communities to identify and protect multiple-use trails and other public trails ~~((in the identified Equestrian Communities))~~ that support horse travel within the Rural Area.
- R-113 Soft-surface multiple-use trails in corridors separate from road rights-of-way are the preferred option for equestrian travel for safety reasons and to avoid conflicts with residential activities associated with the street. Existing off-road trails should be preserved during site development, with relocation as appropriate to accommodate development while maintaining trail connections. The King County Road Design Standards ~~((shall be revised, with input from representatives of the equestrian community, to))~~ will accommodate safe equestrian travel within road rights-of-way. Where appropriate, capital improvement programs for transportation and park facilities shall also enable the use of new facilities by equestrians. Construction standards for multiple-use nonmotorized trails to be established in road rights-of-way within ~~((identified equestrian communities))~~ the Rural Area should assure a minimum eight-foot-wide gravel shoulder on arterial roads and 4.5 foot gravel shoulder on local access roads, or provide a trail separated from the driving lanes by a ditch or other barrier. Construction standards for soft-surface multiple-use nonmotorized trails in corridors separate from road rights-of-way shall be consistent with current trail construction and maintenance practices as promulgated by the U.S. Forest Service.
- R-114 King County's land use regulations should protect rural equestrian community trails by supporting preservation of equestrian trail links in ~~((Equestrian Communities))~~ the Rural Area, protect~~((ion))~~ing ~~((of))~~ livestock from intrusions from residential development, and encouraging subdivision

layouts that preserve opportunities for keeping of horses. Representatives of the equestrian community shall be given the opportunity to review and monitor regulatory and programmatic actions by King County, such as rural area development regulations, that have the potential to affect equestrian uses.

R-114a Property owners in the Agricultural and Forest Production Districts are encouraged to voluntarily allow continued equestrian access to existing trails or alternative access if the existing trail impedes future use of their property.

R-115 Equestrian trails should be ~~((recognized as “linear parks” for purposes of))~~ a category in the county’s Public Benefit Rating System((-)), so that a landowner who provides trail access may qualify for a tax reduction under the program.

5. Rural Area Health

New policies relating to increasing the health of the Rural Area residents is a significant addition to this Chapter. Highlights include:

- A new section titled “Promoting Public Health in the Rural Area,” (p. 3-27), includes text and policies which link the concepts of walkable communities and local food production to improving the public health in the Rural Area. R-415 encourages pedestrian connectivity in the Rural Towns and Rural Neighborhood Commercial Centers. R-416 promotes the establishment of community gardens and other community-based food growing projects to serve the rural residents.

R-415 Pedestrian connectivity, where consistent with rural character, should be encouraged to promote walking and bicycling and to improve public health within Rural Towns and larger Rural Neighborhood Commercial Centers.

R-416 King County should explore ways of creating and supporting community gardens and other similar community based food growing projects to provide and improve access to healthy food for all rural residents.

- A new section titled “Agriculture and the Food System,” (p. 3-44 & 3- 45) where text and policies (R-554h through R-554l) recognize the many benefits of locally produced foods and provides policy support to encourage local food production. In addition, several amendments throughout the chapter provide policy support for the infrastructure needed to move food from farm to market, thereby increasing the economic viability of local agriculture.¹

R-554h King County should work with farmers and ranchers to better understand the constraints to increased food production in the county and develop

¹ For example see R-544, page 3-40 and R-553a and c, pages 3-42 and 3-43.

programs that reduce barriers and create incentives to growing food crops and raising food-producing livestock.

R-554i King County should prioritize its programs to help build and support a sustainable, reliable, equitable, and resilient local food system.

R-554j King County should consider adopting procurement policies that would encourage purchases of locally grown fresh foods.

R- 554k King County should promote local food production and processing to reduce the distance that food must travel from farm to table.

If the Committee wishes to expand on health and/or food system focus in this Chapter, as envisioned by the Framework policies FW-103 and 105, staff are prepared to develop specific options for Committee consideration, including a better link between the rural food production and processing and urban consumption.

6. Climate change in the Rural Area

The Executive has updated some existing policies to include climate change reduction benefits from a sustainable forestry industry. See R-531 at p. 3-36.

R-531 King County promotes forest management that achieves long-term forest health~~((;))~~; protection of watersheds, ~~((sensitive))~~ critical areas and habitat to support fish and wildlife populations~~((;))~~; protection of threatened and endangered species~~((, and))~~; ~~((preservation))~~ conservation and economic viability of working forests; carbon sequestration and reduction in green house gas emissions; and adaptation to climate change.

Additionally, new policies in the Forestry and Agricultural Sections of this Chapter² promote the County working with other agencies to monitor the effects climate change and green house gas emissions could have on these industries.

R-534a King County should continue to collaborate with the University of Washington, Washington State University including Extension, state and federal agencies, and forest landowners to monitor and evaluate impacts of climate change on forests in King County.

R-554b The county shall work with federal, state, local, and private agencies to ensure and maintain adequate water for the needs of agriculture. Assessments of future surface and groundwater availability for agriculture should consider projected impacts of climate change.

² pp. 3-38 and 3-43.

R-554c King County should continue to collaborate with Washington State University including Extension, the University of Washington, and King Conservation District to develop information on the likely impacts of climate change on agriculture in King County, and to develop mitigation and adaptation strategies that are appropriate for King County's soils and farm economy. Research should address soil management, water storage, irrigation, alternative crops, integrated pest management, and nutrient management. The information should be made available to farmers through technical assistance programs and farm planning.

While these new policies do not directly implement the FW-105 goal of reducing County operations' greenhouse gas production, they are in line with the County's goals to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change found in Chapter 4 (Environment).

ATTACHMENTS:

None